

Fear Not, Paul...

Be of good cheer...For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.

– Acts 27:22-24 –

As we tread the pathway of discipleship, there is no doubt that many of us find ourselves returning frequently to the example of the Apostle Paul for strength and encouragement. As we familiarize and remind ourselves of his tireless efforts, his character becomes a distinct and shining beacon of what it means to press for the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. There are so many accurate words we could use to describe the Apostle – bold, tenacious, wise, fiery, resolute, prolific, faithful, *ad infinitum*. One adjective that perhaps does not immediately recommend itself, even though it would be just as biblically accurate, at least at certain moments in his post-conversion life, is *afraid*.

Fear is a necessary result of sin to mankind. It is a painful reminder of our exposure to harm due to our broken fellowship with the Almighty. It was one of Adam's first realizations of that broken fellowship after his fall in the garden – "I heard Thy voice... and I was afraid..." (Gen. 3:10). None of Adam's natural offspring is immune to fear. No matter what height of either courage or bravado is exhibited, each of us shall experience times where fear is overwhelming, threatening to paralyze our confidence and even cease our very breath. "His confidence shall be rooted out of his tabernacle, and it shall bring him to the king of terrors." (Job 18:14)

It is little wonder, then, that even the converted Paul, Christ's Apostle to the Gentiles, was acquainted with fear. In Macedonia, Paul reminds us that "our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears" (2 Cor 7:5). In Corinth, after being rejected by a number of the Jews, the Lord appears by night in a vision to encourage Paul to "Be not *afraid*, but speak..." (Acts 18:9, *in. loc.*) The ensuing text shows us that the resistance was strong enough within eighteen months to create a civil disruption within the city, so Paul's apprehension was not unfounded. The threat of harm in Corinth was substantial, and Paul knew it. And in our launching text, we see that an angel was dispatched to assuage the Apostle's fear upon the tempest tossed ship.

But just as the realization that even the Apostle Paul experienced fear is a comfort to our hearts, so his response to it should be our antidote to this intrusive pest as well. "Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: *for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me*" (Acts 27:25) Yes! Faith is fear's nemesis. For our God has a purpose for each of us, just as He had for the Apostle.

Friends, as we find ourselves in midst of this historic, global COVID 19 pandemic, fear and anxiety will be a tenacious tormentor of our peace. Much of what we are experiencing is unknown, and the unknown's standard-bearer is always fear. When fearfulness begins to molest our imperfect hearts we must willfully and resolutely, like Paul, choose to "believe God", reminding ourselves of His manifold promises. He has promised that all things work together for our good. He has promised that we are a peculiar people, set apart to Himself. He has promised that He will carry the work that He started in each of us to completion. He has promised that we are come to the Kingdom for such a time as this. He has promised that neither height, nor depth, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor death, nor life, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Brethren, let us boldly be of good cheer, and believe God.